

## 5 Worries Parents Should Drop, And 5 They Shouldn't

by Meagen Voss

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*Shoomp shoomp shoomp.* Hear that?

That's the sound of helicopter parents hovering over their children, worrying every second of the day that terrorists could strike Johnny's school or a stranger will snatch Jane from the bus stop.

Scary stuff. But it turns out most parents are worrying about all the wrong things.

"These worries that we have are so rare," says Christie Barnes, mother of four and author of *The Paranoid Parents Guide*. "It's like packing a snow shovel in case it snows in Las Vegas."

Based on surveys Barnes collected, the top five worries of parents are, in order:

1. Kidnapping
2. School snipers
3. Terrorists
4. Dangerous strangers
5. Drugs

But how do children really get hurt or killed?

1. Car accidents
2. Homicide (usually committed by a person who knows the child, not a stranger)
3. Abuse
4. Suicide
5. Drowning

Why such a big discrepancy between worries and reality? Barnes says parents fixate on rare events because they internalize horrific stories they hear on the news or from a friend without stopping to think about the odds the same thing could happen to their children.

"I'd love it if every news story came with a little warning at the bottom that said, 'Even though this is very tragic, this is 1 in 10 million, 1 in a million or 1 in 20', " says Barnes.

This unnecessary worrying, she argues, is detrimental to parents. The stress worry-wracked parents endure can harm their health and their relationships with

other adults. Also, focusing on rare dangers distracts parents from the dangers that matter.

As for children, Barnes says that overprotectiveness will hurt them in the long run by making them less resilient. "We're teaching them to be helpless," she says. "And because *we're* so afraid of the world, we're teaching *them* to be afraid of the world."

So, what's a worried parent to do? Barnes has a simple prescription: helmets and seatbelts. Yup, that's right, **helmets** and **seatbelts**. "I know it sounds boring," she says, but according to her research, making kids wear protective gear and buckle up in the car cuts kids' chances of death by 90 percent and their chances of serious injury by 78 percent.

"We think worry means that we love our kids," Barnes says. "So we're kind of fooling ourselves to think that all this research and all this worry we're doing is actually love... because it isn't."

Source: <http://www.npr.org/blogs/health/2010/08/30/129531631/5-worries-parents-should-drop-and-5-they-should>